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Unsung Hero: Vanja Jokic Raznjevic

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Following years of mistakes that caused deaths of accident victims, many fatalities, a new legislation of the National Police of Peru now ensures demining quality for 1711 jobs.

Transmission of the demining quality for 1711 jobs.

Unsung Hero: VANJA JOKIC RAZNJEVIC

by Jennette Townsend and Rachel Canfield [Mine Action Information Center]

As a single mother, Vanja Ražnjević felt that she had no other choice than to apply for a demining position with Norwegian People's Aid. "I needed a job," says Ražnjević, "and this job seemed really normal for me because I spent time [in Croatia] during the war and became accustomed to danger."

During the war, Ražnjević lived in Benkovac, a little town close to Zadar. The town was a part of former Krajina, a region in Croatia where Serbs live; therefore, Benkovac was on the front line of the war. As a civilian, she encountered danger every day. "Bombs and grenades were all around," says Ražnjević.

Landmines are still a prevalent problem in Croatia, and Ražnjević's children are learning about them as a result of their mother's job. "I always talk with them about the landmine situation and about my job. They understand what I am doing and they know the dangers of demining."

It has been six years since Ražnjević attended the Croatian Ministry of Interior's national demining training course in Zagreb. She was the only woman in the group of trainees. She graduated from the course as one of the best participants and started working in the field alongside veteran male deminers. "In the beginning I was inexperienced," says Ražnjević, "but my more experienced colleagues taught me the demining procedures that I was not familiar with. I can say that I have not received any criticism for my work as a deminer. It is not permissible to make a mistake in this job."

Ražnjević's calm confidence and her ability to coordinate her personal and professional life have won admiration from her colleagues. Silvija Bogdany, Ražnjević's former team leader, says of Ražnjević: "She is under much more pressure. I think that her children are always on her mind. For me, things are rather simple. I don't have as much responsibility. I try not to bring my work home with me, but it is easy for me to do so because nobody is waiting for me at home except for a few spiders that I have and they are good listeners. For Vanja things are different. It is hard to be a mother and a deminer at the same time."

Likewise, Ražnjević expresses respect for her co-workers. "The courage of my colleagues has made an impression on me," says Ražnjević. She recalls one time when a fire started in a mined area: "It was very dangerous, but we did not run. We fought the fire and we won, of course."

In the past six years, Ražnjević has learned a lot about demining and about teamwork. "I can help build the foundation for good relations between us deminers," says Ražnjević. Even with all the knowledge she has already gained, she still



Vanja Ražnjević demining in Croatia.
PHOTO BY MIROSLAV HORVAT KIKI

wishes to learn more about mine action. In 2007 she will finish her studies in pyrotechnology, which have included subjects such as anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance, explosion physics, management and humanitarian demining. "I think that it is important for deminers to be adequately educated and I think that it is important to develop deminers' rights."

Her vision for the future of demining is optimistic: "I believe that we will find a more effective way to remove the problem. I hope that I will still be working in this field when we do," says Ražnjević. "In the future I wish to work as a leader of demining projects all over the world. To do that, I will need practical work experience as an assistant to a person who already is doing this type of work," she says.

Reflecting on her career as a deminer, Ražnjević says her experiences with demining have been good: "I can say that I have found myself in this job. I am clearing landmines with pleasure. I feel happy when I can destroy something that can destroy somebody's life. I am ready to continue demining in the future, but I will never do the opposite—I mean I don't want to lay mines. There is no politician, no idea and no money that can pressure me to do that!"



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News Brief

Angolan Landmine Commission Establishes Monitoring Team

The Coordinator of the Provincial Commission on Landmine Action and Humanitarian Aid (CNIDAH) in Huambo, Angola, announced the formation of a team to monitor demining methods by the end of 2007.

Agostinho Njaka said the team will work in heavily mined provinces like Bailundo, Huambo, Katchiungo and Tchicala-Tcholohanga. The team will evaluate demining policies and strategies with the goal of alleviating long delays in the monitoring of the quality of cleared areas.

The team members will be incorporated into the demining process as soon as possible and will facilitate clearance operations for the opening of new roads and farmland.